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## **Six Weavers**

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# **STRIKING PATTERNS**

**Global Traces in Local Ikat Fashion**

Publication accompanying the exhibition  
"striking patterns. Global Traces in Local Ikat Fashion"  
October 21, 2016 – March 26, 2017.



Museum der Kulturen, Basel  
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FMB – Freiwilliger Museumsverein Basel  
MKB – Museum der Kulturen Basel, Schweiz  
UCLA – University of California, Los Angeles

# Six Weavers

### An Originality of its Own — Anastasia Bhoa (57)

Anastasia Bhoa was born in Nggela in 1959. She is single but fostered the daughter of her elder sister, who lives in Ende, for many years. Through hard work, her selling skills and small sums of money she loans from the local credit cooperative, Mama Anas and her mother make quite a good living off ikat weaving. Inspired by working with a group of weavers under the direction of a regional textile expert, Mama Anas has developed a distinct style of her own.

Learning the trade: "I began to tie small patterns at the age of thirteen. At the same time I began weaving the white men's sarong [blue-black chequered on a white background]. In 1973 I was already making the women's sarong *lawo redu*, selling them in Paga or giving them to my affinal kin as a gift. By 1976 I had learnt how to arrange the yarn on the ikat frame for a *lawo redu*. A kind neighbour, Mama Fita, taught me how to do it, so I learnt by doing. My first indigo sarong was a *lawo gami teresa*. My mother didn't do ikat work, but she did the indigo dyeing for others, so I helped her. I learnt about morinda dyeing [red] whilst involved in the Proyek Lawo Kembo [1993 – 1999]. I wrote everything down about this method of dyeing, and now I know it by heart." "The patterns are my own ideas, I didn't get them from my forbears. My grandmother came from a different place, so she only worked in the fields. Mama Hara also instructed me, but she lived far away. Mama Fita knew all the patterns, except for the pictorial motifs."<sup>1</sup>

The expert: "From the age of twenty-five on I regarded myself as an expert, not least because I knew that if I really tried, I could do it. To begin with I only knew *lawo redu* and *lawo gami terasa*." "Now I can ikat all the motifs as long as I have a template; I only know the *lawo redu* by heart. For inspiration I look at pictures in books or else I ask other women for their sarongs and give them betel nut in exchange. I do all my ikat in hiding so other women can't see my work [and spoil it]."

The future of ikat weaving: "The times are changing. The naturally dyed cloths will disappear. The young women who have been to grammar school, but I taught her how to do ikat. She knows everything about it. They are terribly spoilt. My foster-daughter also went to grammar school, but I taught her how to do ikat. She knows about everything. Nowadays mobile phones are spoiling the young people. Doing the work properly is a thing of yesterday."

The local ikat fashion: "I like wearing the *lawo redu*, the *lawo kelimara* and the *lawo kapa*, but not the *lawo gamba*. That's something for the young women of today, not for me."

1 All statements by the weavers in the portraits translated from Indonesian to German by Willemijn de Jong and into English by the translator.





### Always New Patterns — Elisabeth Pango (69)

Elisabeth Pango was born in 1947. Her husband is a farmer. They have a daughter, also a weaver, and a granddaughter. Earlier on they also looked after the daughter of her husband's brother. Mama Ango's father was a leader of the aristocratic house Sa'o Sambajati in Nggela. Her mother died when she was still at primary school after which she went to live with a stepmother. She learnt from a neighbour, a member of the important house of Sa'o Ria. Mama Ango is one of the most talented and innovative weavers in the village, regularly creating new geometrical as well as figurative patterns. As yet, her daughter has not shown this talent.

Learning the trade: "After finishing primary school, I began to learn about weaving. I never went to secondary school. I began practising with the white men's sarong, the one with the blue and black chequers [on a white background], and stuck to it until it was finished. With regard to doing ikat, I began with the horse motif. I found it easy, from the start. It seems I have talent. In those days there were no chemical dyes, so you went out in search of the roots of a morinda tree. When I was about thirteen, I began with a second ikat pattern, the *redu* motif, after that the *barai*. I was shown how to do the horse motif, after that I learnt for myself, just by looking at the patterns on the sarongs the women were wearing."

The expert: "After getting married, I made cloths using indigo and morinda dyes. For the men's sarong I still use indigo; morinda I now only use for the *luka semba*." "After my daughter was born, I began to create my own patterns, I had my own ideas. The motifs are mine, I didn't get them from any ancestress." "As soon as I arrange the yarn on the ikat frame, the picture of the sarong I want to create comes to me. I don't know it beforehand. I never imitate the patterns of others, they're always my own. And I always create variations. Only in the case of the *lawo luka semba* I always stick to the existing pattern."

The future of ikat weaving: "The young women will keep on doing ikat weaving. There are still many women who weave. On the part of the men it's different, not many of them are into farming these days. More and more are leaving for the towns to work on projects [in construction]. The young women take a worn sarong to the market in Wolowaru and sell it for 100,000 or 150,000 rupiah, just to get enough for school money. Or they make a *luka semba* shoulder cloth and sell it in Ende. The difficulty is always getting the right price and taking care that the people actually pay for the cloth they take with them, as soon as they get paid their wages. Two of my sarongs have disappeared like this lately. My daughter sold them, but hasn't received the money for them yet."





### **Ikat Fashion for the Church — Maria Ferdinanda Bela (53)**

Maria Ferdinanda Bela was born in 1963. Her husband works as an electrician for a private company in Wolowaru, a close-by larger settlement. The two live in Nggela. They have a foster-child, the son of a cousin, who at present is studying in the provincial capital of Kupang. Mama Din is famous for creating ikat cloths which many Catholic priests in the region include as part of their cassock when officiating in church.

Learning the trade: "I only learnt to do ikat after leaving primary school in 1976. In 1980 I graduated from secondary school, in 1984 from grammar school. From 1984 to 1989 I taught at the local secondary school on a voluntary basis; from 1989 to 1990 I studied to become a teacher of Religious Education. I practised doing ikat up to 1985. I first made a *lawo pundi siku mbira lere*, then a *lawo kapa*. These are difficult patterns, but I had the courage to try them. It was only after finishing education in 1990 that I began to weave seriously. My mother instructed me. I found both my family background and my own ideas important. Around that time I also began dyeing. I knew a lot about indigo dyeing, but had never done it with my own hands, so I had little practice. But if you really want to learn, you will. I'd worked with naphthol and two or three times with morinda. I also used morinda for the *lawo gamba* that I sold to the minister for industry in Nita [during a meeting of weavers from the wider region] in 2011 for 3'500'000 rupiah." "I create all patterns, including the ones used in church. I know how to do all of them."

Favourite sarongs: "I have many favourite sarongs. I've never worn a pictorial sarong, I just make them for sale. Up to now I've sold many of them, something around 20 pieces. Last year a Chinese trader from Ende asked me: 'Can you do the eagle again?' But I said: 'No, sorry I have too much work.'"

The future of ikat weaving: "Ikat weaving will never die out in Nggela, it's what we do to earn our living. There's too little money from farming, our main source of income are the sarongs. Many young women do weaving. I don't get around too much, which is probably why I don't know any weavers who really work precisely. I only get to see them at church or at festivals, but I get the impression they're not really up to it yet. When they arrange the pattern with the small horizontal sticks, they're not precise enough, they're doing it too quickly. Fixing the pattern is very important. There are a few older women who are really good at it. Some of the weavers in the past were really good, too, they created nothing but beautiful and precisely-worked cloths."







### Creating Patterns from the Heart — Maria Letisia Bo'a (47)

Maria Letisia Bo'a was born in 1969. She is a primary school teacher and weaver in Jopu; her husband works as a secretary at the local parish office. They have five children. The eldest two are studying in Papua, one daughter goes to grammar school in Ende, while the youngest two visit the village school. Mama Leti creates high-quality sarongs with complex patterns, unlike many weavers in Jopu who are out for the quick sale at the market of Wolowaru.

Learning the trade: "I started with ikat in the third grade of primary school to help my mother. I did it from the heart, and on my own incentive. I mastered the more difficult *lawo ndea* during my time at secondary school, the *lawo pundi* with the very fine patterns during grammar school." "It's important to have talent and a strong will. Many women only weave, they're too lazy to do ikat. My own two daughters are like that, they don't want to learn it. You have to want it from the heart. You shouldn't have to push them, if you do, nothing comes of it." "Some women come to Jopu because they're married here and some of them have the will to learn ikat weaving, even become really good at it. It's all a matter of will."

Ikat weaving for sale and wear: "I do my ikat weaving in the evening, during the day I work at school." "I make my own sarongs to wear, for others I work on commission, for example, a *lawo pundi* for a wedding or a graduation ceremony." "I work to earn money for my children's education. I do difficult ikat patterns; it takes longer, but that way I can earn more money. The *adat-sarong lawo mogha mite*, for example, costs 800,000 rupiah. Two women from the village ordered one a piece, a third one I'm making for myself. For the black dye I use naphthol. It costs 100,000 rupiah for one sarong. You need a lot of dyestuff."

The future of ikat weaving: "It is only the women of Jopu who are capable of such fine ikat weaving. For tying they use very fine coconut fibres." "There will always be ikat weaving, there always has been. That's the tradition here. There's little money to be earned in farming, so it's the women that have to work to provide food. The women have their ikat weaving, the men work in the fields. A husband should support his wife; together they can earn a living. But the only source of income is the sale of sarongs. All women here know how to make a *lawo gami terasa*, but they don't know how to make the more difficult sarongs. In Nggela the women's work is easy-going. Here they also work in the evenings. If three people work together, they can produce and sell two sarongs per week. There's not a house in which the women don't work."







### Weaving for Life — Petronela Ji'e (61)

Petronela Ji'e was born in 1955. Like many women of her generation, she is single. She is of aristocratic descent and member of the house of Sa'o Ria of Nggela. That is also where she learnt ikat weaving, among others from the famous weaver Nenek Nduru, who used to reinterpret the designs of old trade cloths. Mama Pape's mother lived in Dili in East Timor for many years and only taught her a few of the secrets of indigo and morinda dyeing. Mama Pape is one of the well-known weavers in Nggela; she regularly sells her cloths for good money to outside traders, some of which come from as far as Bali.

Learning the trade: "I have always had a talent for weaving. Even when I was still at primary school in the fourth or fifth grade, I used to create small ikat patterns after school. And when my aunt made a botch of something, I used to set it straight. The first time I tied yarn to an ikat frame was in the second grade of secondary school. The first sarong I did the ikat for was a morinda-dyed short *lawo redu*; after that came a *lawo wenda* [with a horse motif]. At that time I was living in Ende, up to around the age of twenty, after that I moved to Nggela." "The first cloth I wove was the white men's sarong [blue-black on a white background] when I was in the fifth or sixth grade at primary school. In those days people still used hand-spun yarn. It was hard work, but I was strong-willed. At around the same time I came to appreciate the colour blue in the patterns and learnt about indigo dyeing, mainly from Mama Sebe of Sa'o Ria. She told me to press hard but it took about twenty to thirty pots until I got the hang of it. I've always been a hard worker. I began working with morinda even before that, and I've kept it up ever since." "One day, I was around twenty at the time, Nenek Nduru called me to come and pound the rinds of some morinda roots. Around the same time she taught me how to do the ikat for the shoulder cloths *luka semba* and *luka kapa*. Not long afterwards, Nenek Nduru fell ill. I was afraid she'd fallen ill because she'd shown me how to do the ikat for the *semba* motif."

The expert: "The *lawo rangka* [preferred by many young weavers] is the only cloth I've never made. I know all the other ikat types and create many variations." "You're only really qualified for ikat weaving after the age of forty. That's when you stop thinking about men all the time and stick to weaving."

The future of ikat weaving: "The older I get the more I work for my brothers' and sisters' children and grandchildren." "I teach young talented weavers whom I'm related to. Still, quite a few young women in Nggela are simply lazy and don't work seriously enough."



### Young, but She Knows How to Do Ikat — Maria Adriana Simo (34)

Maria Adriana Simo was born in Nggela in 1982. Her husband is a farmer. They live in rather poor conditions, which is why their two daughters live with Mama Rin's mother in the same village. This is not an uncommon arrangement in the area. One of the reasons for the couple's difficult conditions lies in the practice of gift exchange. In many cases the system provides social support but, at the same time, it is a burden. Mama Rin's husband has several sisters, which means that, according to local custom, she and her husband have to provide them with cloths whenever someone marries or dies. In other words, Mama Rin produces many cloths, but earns little money. Still, she has a good reputation as a weaver. She is said to be an exacting worker, despite her young age.

Learning the trade: "I began weaving while still at secondary school, after that I went on to grammar school." "I only began to do ikat after getting married. I learnt it from my mother's side of the family."

The expert: "Since I've been married I have been doing all the work steps on my own. But I still cannot do all the ikat patterns. For example, the stylized human figure and the gold ornaments of the *lima desa* sarong which my mother used to make. I've tried doing them, but I still haven't quite mastered them yet."

Working under difficult conditions: "This men's sarong I'm making for someone else, to earn a bit on the side. For one panel I get 200,000 rupiah. This year and the year before a pest destroyed our rice crop which meant we had to buy rice." "A short while ago I finished a *lawo nepa*. I didn't do all the ikat myself, my deceased aunt, Mama Maria Rere, did the most difficult part, the horizontal band (*foko*), back in 2008. The yarn was hers. After her death, I finished doing the ikat and dyed the yarn in 2009. But before that I lit a candle for my aunt. After that I stopped working on the cloth [for reasons of piety]. I finished the sarong around Easter of 2015. It's made of white synthetic yarn. The weaving was difficult and took a long time, a whole month, because the yarn kept snapping, after lying around for such a long time."

The future of ikat weaving: "Many women of my age have studied and have found a job elsewhere, or moved away for other reasons. Nearly all of them have left the village. But there are some families, like my own, who cannot afford to pay for their children's further education. And some of the women have come back and are now into ikat and weaving again." "Ikat weaving won't die out, it's something the women of Nggela have always done—despite many of them moving away to work or study."







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